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ABSTRACT

State program approval could significantly influence the redesign of teacher education programs because of its legal authority. This paper reviews the functions of state program approval, and compares these processes with those of national voluntary accreditation organizations, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. State program approval systems differ considerably across the country; their processes, standards, strengths, and weaknesses are discussed. Other areas of discussion include: (1) the probable future relationship between state program approval and national accreditation; (2) the influence of state examinations on the need for a program approval system; and (3) a proposed new basis for program approval, using various evaluations of program outcomes. (SP)

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EXTERNAL STRATEGIES:
COMPETENCY TESTING AND STATE PROGRAM APPROVAL

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There are several major areas which need to be reviewed in looking at state program approval in view of the context of the conference. Some of these are to clarify what program approval is, how it compares to national accreditation, and what it is supposed to do. Another major area is how program approval can have an impact on the redesign of teacher education, particularly the influence it is likely to have in the future given the changes in trends in our state systems across the country.

I will address three general topics: First, the function of state program approval; second, the status of these procedures across the country; and third, the potential future impact on programs and changes in the status of program approval. Integrated throughout the discussion of these three topics will be references to the role of state program approval as a change agent and its effectiveness in having an impact on teacher education programs.

Function of Program Approval

Program approval is conducted from the context that it is intended to protect the public interest in education of children and youth in the schools. In order to protect the public interest, the state must assure that those who instruct in the public school classrooms and the preparation of those who instruct meet minimum criteria. Program approval is thus instituted and conducted in order to insure that this public interest is protected.

The ultimate purpose of program approval is to insure the competency of the graduates of the program. This is of primary importance and it is the end result of that process. The process is usually conducted by

assuring that programs meet some type of state standards. Meeting these standards at the appropriate level is intended to mean that graduates of those programs have the necessary degree of competency.

It is also important to note that program approval processes are conducted in order to carry out the responsibility of and under the legal authority of the state. Program approval is thus meant to serve the state regulatory function. This legal authority of state program approval is an important characteristic of that process.

Another important aspect of state program approval is that it is mandatory. The state board of education, state commission, or other body which is responsible for the approval of teacher education programs in the respective state requires that the programs leading to the certification of teachers be approved by that legal regulatory body. The institution may exist without such approval; however, it may not recommend individuals to the state for purposes of certification. The program thus must meet the state standards and be reviewed by the state through its program approval procedures in order to participate in the state certification system.

When comparing state program approval functions with national accreditation, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), there are many specific differences. NCATE, for example, is voluntary. Schools of education are not required to seek national accreditation as they are with state program approval. Furthermore, the institutions must pay for the service of being accredited nationally, since they are initiating the request.

Another important point deals with the power or influence of the accrediting body. NCATE's power rests on professional authority. It can only recommend and suggest but not require any changes be made. Because

of this, NCATE has had a limited effect on institutional change. This was reported by Wheeler in his evaluation of NCATE entitled "NCATE: Does it Make a Difference?" According to him, NCATE needs access to external ~~leaders~~ layers of power if it intends to have a real degree of influence on change at the institution. External ~~leaders~~ layers means external to the school, college, or department of education, such as president of the university, the public, or others who can bring pressures for change. Thus, it appears that national accreditation as an external strategy for change has not been very effective.

Another aspect of the function of state approval is that it is designed for purposes of approving a program for purposes of issuing a teaching certificate. This means that the state is approving a program, for example, at the secondary level for a certificate to teach a specific subject at that secondary level. NCATE, on the other hand, is more of a generic approval. It is approval by level, such as elementary or secondary, not a specific program for a specific certificate.

The differences in the processes emanate from the differences in the purposes of the two accrediting functions. State approval is to protect the public interest. It has responsibility for insuring that the individual completes the program which is specific to a particular certificate in the grade level or subject which they will be teaching in schools. This must be done because of the strong public interest. On the other hand, NCATE is a professional accrediting function. It is more concerned with generic approval related to the quality of the institutional program in general.

Status of Program Approval

Almost all states have some type of program approval procedure. One survey indicated that Nevada has been the only exception to this. Nevada

used Northwest Regional or NCATE accreditation in lieu of its own, but it is just now initiating its own state approval. In effect, all states have some type of procedure for approving programs for purposes of state legal recognition.

A more fundamental issue, however, is the type of procedure, particularly in terms of the frequency of being reviewed. The key issue is the number of states that have a system for periodically reviewing the programs at some set interval. A 1979 survey indicated that almost all states also had an on-site evaluation requirement for program approval on a periodic basis. The states which do not were Montana, Michigan, Nevada, and North Dakota. Usually the interval is every five years for the on-site visit.

A critical question that one needs to ask is what is the ultimate effect on this review procedure? How well does it work? What is the real status of this system? In general the state sends in some type of team which does the evaluation and recommends accreditation to the governing body, such as the state board of education or a state commission. The actual decision is thrust in the hands of the state governing body. In many instances, politics dictates the ultimate decision. There may be no force which requires real change. The political forces may in effect require that institutions in the districts represented by legislators not be put out of business.

Texas provides an interesting case study in this regard. In an interview of teacher education and certification division personnel in the Texas Education Agency, it was revealed that the TEA has never rejected a program and never will. The Attorney General in Texas indicated that Texas law clearly allows the TEA to approve teacher education and certification programs, but it did not let the TEA disapprove them. In effect, it could

not put a program out of business. One state official, who was head of the agency at the time, was quoted as saying "As long as you have decision making in the political arena, political pressure can determine the decision." The author of the article who presented this quote indicated that shutting down a college of education would draw the same reaction from the local legislator as shutting down a military base, except that the Pentagon packs more clout and once and a while gets its way.

Herein lies the fundamental weakness in state program approval. It is subject to political pressures within the state. On the other hand, legal authority to provide for change seldom exercises its authority to the extent that it would remove a program or an institution. In this respect many would say it is a "toothless tiger." However, it should be noted that many significant changes are required in this process even though an institution may not be totally deleted or disapproved.

An additional point is that quite often the state education agencies are not equipped to do the task which they are assigned and legally required to conduct because of too little staff or resources available. Furthermore, almost never is there any evaluation of the system itself to determine if it is functioning effectively.

The Future of Program Approval

One of the areas which I was asked to address is to make projections in terms of the status of program approval and the potential impact upon schools, colleges, and departments of education. One of the activities which we may see in the future is a procedure for actually accrediting the state program approval systems themselves. This has been proposed by a group of colleges and universities. In effect, the suggestion is that criteria be established to determine the effectiveness of the state program

approval systems to insure that they themselves meet certain quality standards.

The problem with this interesting twist on "accrediting the accreditor" is that there is no authority for such a body or a process. The states have the responsibility and operate within their own legal domain. An external body cannot intrude on that legal responsibility. On the other hand, there could be a "professional" influence such as that which NCATE exercises over its institutions. This might help lead those states with insufficient systems to strengthen the programs and build-in those factors which would insure a more effective evaluation system. It should be noted, however, that no matter what the desires for improving the state systems on the part of the state agency personnel, for the most part this change is in the hands of the legislatures and others who control funding.

Another possibility is that a system of this type can be established through the National Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC). This is an organization of those state directors who have responsibility for putting the systems into place. This organization could have an even greater professional influence on its members and has the expertise for designing the basic elements of such a system. Initial efforts have been made to provide some technical assistance to state agency personnel, but not in the direction of developing criteria for effective systems. It is highly likely that such systems would be mostly process criteria but might also include some content standards. NASDTEC already has developed standards for state program approval, and these are used by a number of states.

Again it should be noted that although this could provide a positive professional influence, a very significant barrier would be the funding to

carry out these programs as such and that would be in the hands of the state legislatures.

NEA has recognized the role of state education agencies in program approval and the need to strengthen these systems. NEA's new document, "Excellence in Teacher Education: An Action Plan," specifically addresses itself to the need for strengthening state program approval systems. It also identifies ways in which this can be done. I believe that this interest on the part of NEA will provide a very strong force for the improvement and strengthening of the state agency roles in program approval.

NCATE has received a new proposal from the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE). This proposal suggests that NCATE move to what is called a "unit approach." This means that NCATE would in effect evaluate the instructional unit; that is, the school, college, or department of education within the institution of higher education. It proposes that more specific evaluations of instructional programs within the unit be delegated to state education agency program approval systems. It thus relies on the state program approval system and recognizes its role and legal authority. This proposal is currently under consideration by NCATE. I think ultimately this force should also strengthen the role of state education agencies and program approval.

Another area of influence is that of the Interstate Certification Agreement. In effect, this is a system of interstate certification reciprocity based on legislation passed in each of the participating states. Legislation enables the state to engage in contracts with other states with whom they wish to have a reciprocal agreement. An important condition in each of those contracts is the requirement that each state perform on-site reviews of programs every five years. This requirement and the technical assistance provided by the Interstate Agreement should continue to strengthen

the state agency program approval systems. I anticipate that interstate will continue to require state program approval on a periodic basis. We are in the process of renewing the contracts which have been written for five year intervals, and it has been determined that this will remain a viable and important part of the new contracts.

It is my opinion that this force should also strengthen the role of the state agency and program approval procedures. The Interstate Certification Agreement will continue to grow and exert its influence on participating states.

A question which has frequently been discussed in recent years is the effect of examinations on state program approval. The Interstate Certification Agreement has tried to diminish the differences among state systems in order to provide for interstate reciprocity. The agreement states that in effect, once one has completed an approved program in one state he/she is eligible for a comparable initial certificate in a participating state. The participating states may not add additional requirements for those coming from other states. However, there may be what are called "noneducational requirements" which they are free to impose. These usually are factors such as age and citizenship. The Interstate Agreement has viewed examinations for certification as "noneducational requirements," and thus has not allowed these to interfere with the reciprocity system.

The question still remains as to whether or not examinations would replace program approval, the rationale being that if one has to pass an exam why should he/she complete an approved program. I would think that in the future program approval will continue to be in place and in fact would be strengthened. This would be in spite of state examinations, because what is happening is that examinations are becoming <u>part of</u> program approval

procedures, not for certification only. Program approval procedures are more and more looking towards outcome data as part of the means for approving programs, and an examination may become an integral part of that. Examinations, however, will have an increasing influence on the teacher education curriculum since institutions will want to insure that their graduates pass the examinations.

There are at least three sources one could use to form an outcomes data base. One would be examinations of individuals as they graduate; the second would be on-the-job observation, such as during internships; and the third would be follow-up surveys of graduates and employers to determine the effectiveness of the training program. All of these data could be used collectively to form program evaluation decisions.

Finally, there is the issue of what impact program approval procedures might have in the future. The program approval system now is an important external influence because it has a widespread effect and also effects each and every program, even though there is some limitation on the actual deletion of institutions. I believe this influence would probably increase in view of the several forces I previously identified. This is particularly true in view of the efforts of NCATE and the proposal by NEA to strengthen these systems. In order to play a more significant role, however, certain reforms are needed to eliminate some of the weaknesses that were cited.